

Erdogan vows to run roughshod over continuing protests in Turkey

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Speaking yesterday in Tunis before returning to Turkey, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed to continue with plans to destroy Taksim Gezi Park in Istanbul, which triggered large-scale protests against his regime last week.

His speech came as trade unions and business groups tried to wind down continuing protests, issuing a joint statement calling for “peace and stability.”

Erdogan defended his urban remodeling project, saying it would create a “very beautiful environment.” Refusing to issue a further apology—after that of Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc—for the brutal repression of protesters that triggered large-scale protests last Friday, he said: “The sensitivities of the people for environmental issues have been abused. We already expressed our sorrow for the excessive use of force.”

Indicating that he would make no concessions to protesters’ demands, he said it would be “meaningless to have a race... The logic of ‘If I take this, I want this,’ ‘If you give this, I want this’ has no place in running a state.”

Apparently seeking to provide grounds for a renewed police crackdown, Erdogan said: “Among the protesters, there are extremists, some of them implicated in terrorism.”

He compared them to Ecevit Sanli, who was convicted for several terrorist attacks and held responsible for the February 1, 2013 suicide bombing at the US embassy in Ankara. Erdogan commented, “They were caught both at squares and on social media with all they had.”

Erdogan also denounced alleged foreign elements among the protesters.

Turkey’s *Zaman* paper reported that Turkish police had detained 11 foreign nationals with diplomatic passports—four US, two British, two Iranian, one

Indian, one French, and one Greek—on “provocation” charges. The US and British embassies issued statements denying that their citizens had been detained.

A crowd of Turks and Tunisians protested Erdogan’s visit to the unpopular Islamist government of Tunisian Prime Minister Ali Laarayedh. Laarayedh’s Ennadha party, which came to power after the revolutionary working class struggles of 2011 toppled President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, modeled itself on Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) regime. It has since fallen to 30 percent in the polls, due to its anti-worker and pro-business policies.

Demonstrations continued in Turkey. Protesters continued to occupy Taksim Square in Istanbul, though unlike recent days, yesterday did not see the clashes between police and supporters of the Besiktas football club.

There were heavier clashes in the capital, Ankara, where protesters faced off against police along John F. Kennedy Street near the US embassy in Ankara. There were also reports that protesters would be traveling from Istanbul to Ankara, where demonstrators have taken over Kizilay Square.

In Erdogan’s home city of Rize on the Black Sea, a crowd of AKP supporters reportedly clashed with outnumbered members of the Turkish Youth Union (TGB), who were protesting in support of the Gezi Park protesters. Police reportedly fired tear gas to break up the clashes.

Amid this politically explosive situation, a collection of trade unions and business groups issued a statement calling for calm and denouncing “marginal groups” for trying to influence the demonstrations.

They wrote, “We need peace and stability more than ever at this time when the entire world is struggling

with problems and all eyes are on the rising country of Turkey. Nobody should forget that peace and safety in the streets are extremely important for the future of Turkey and our children. Violence and fighting don't solve anything, and they make it impossible to solve problems."

This statement speaks to the reactionary, pro-government perspective animating Turkey's union officialdom. While the KESK public service union called a two-day strike for June 4-5, they saw it as a limited strike—aiming to shift the Erdogan regime's policy towards one more favorable to affluent social layers from which the union bureaucracy is drawn, but not to mobilize the working class in struggle against Erdogan. Aside from reports of a symbolic strike by Turkish air-line workers, there were no more reports of organized working class action yesterday.

The union bureaucracy and the business community are both desperate to shore up the Turkish regime and foreign finance capital's confidence in the government. Turkish capital is highly dependent on external financing, as it runs a current account deficit of 7 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Turkey's Istanbul National 30 stock index fell 5.5 percent after Erdogan's speech in Tunis. ETX Capital market strategist Ishaq Siddiqi called Erdogan's comments "not a smart move ... as his comments threaten to incite further tensions, which could prompt greater unrest and violence in the country."

Siddiqi's comments reflect the central fear of finance capital—that the protests against Erdogan could ignite broader popular discontent, based in the working class, with both social inequality and with Erdogan's unpopular policy of backing the US-led proxy war in neighboring Syria.

The policy of the union bureaucracy is directed at blocking a turn to the working class and a struggle to mobilize it in a socialist struggle against the Erdogan regime and the imperialist intervention in the Middle East—which is the only way forward for the protests.

Otherwise, the Islamists aim to isolate the protests to privileged sections of the middle class and the bourgeois secular opposition and demobilize them. Erdogan and Islamist regimes abroad, such as Egypt's right-wing Muslim Brotherhood (MB) regime, are seeking to make such points, cynically attacking the protests for not speaking to workers' economic

demands.

MB official Mourad Aly criticized the protests for having "nothing to do with daily or economic needs. It is intended to promote the idea that Islamic regimes, which have made economic achievements and proved to the world that they can stand in the face of all external challenges, have failed."

In fact, both the Erdogan regime and the Egyptian regime, based on the MB and the army, have failed to meet the working class' social needs, which can only be advanced through a revolutionary struggle. Both in Ankara and in Cairo, the central fear of ruling elites is of a new movement in the working class, against which regimes are preparing renewed repression.

A day after dozens of young protesters were rounded up on charges of "encouraging rebellion" with their social media posts, Turkey's Islamist President Abdullah Gül again threatened social media users. He said that the use of "provocative expressions," curses, or insults on social media sites would be treated as a crime.



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